Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 109 minutes

While Marvel has seamlessly brought their comic-book superheroes to cinematic life over the past decade, DC has had a much rockier road with their adaptations. Most of them have been hits, but even their supporters would admit that many of the films haven’t had the same kind of impact. The latest attempt to reverse the trend is *Birds of Prey*. It’s a spin-off featuring one of the more successful characters from the 2016 feature,
Suicide Squad
. Sadly, the resulting film is a bit of a mess.

The film opens with a brief history of Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) and her recent break-up with the supervillain, The Joker. She immediately discovers that a great many thugs harbor grudges against her for violent incidents in the past and are seeking vengeance, because she no longer has the protection of her old beau. One such figure is psychotic mobster Roman Sionis (Ewan McGregor), who is also desperate to retrieve a valuable diamond stolen by pickpocket Cassandra Cain (Ella Jay Basco). In order to save her own skin, Quinn makes a deal to find the thief and return the goods. Her task is complicated by the arrival of an assassin named Huntress (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), a singer known as the Black Canary (Jurnee Smollett-Bell), and a determined Gotham City detective (Rosie Perez).

While this seems like a fairly straight-forward plot, the movie delivers the details in a convoluted and bizarrely edited fashion. In fact, the first half of the feature feels more like a montage than a narrative. It’s hard to say whether there was too much material to introduce, or perhaps early

sections simply weren’t working, but the presentation of the story is a jumble. Viewers will see a lot of montages and voice-over narration explaining the plot from Quinn between lines of dialogue. It’s strange to see a movie require a verbal accompaniment in order for events onscreen to make sense, and the overall effect is jarring. The movie attempts some meta-humor as well, but it misses the mark more often than it lands (and in some cases, only draws unwanted attention to the film’s own clichés).

The Harley Quinn character isn’t assisted much by the heavies. Action films are often only as good as their antagonist. With the title heroine already being a big and brash personality, her main foe is also forced into exaggeration. However, in a few scenes it does come across as too over-the-top. And besides being big and brawny, the various goons and nut jobs aren’t bright, which makes them feel like no threat whatsoever to the protagonists. A diabolical and clever maniac would have provided the film with some tension. Unfortunately, the choppy editing and ridiculous behavior on display kills any chance for real thrills.

Thankfully, the movie settles down toward the end of the second act and during its climax. At this point, Quinn is forced into teaming up with others in order to square off against the mobsters. When she and her compatriots are finally allowed to stand around, trade barbs and define their personalities through dialogue, they become relatable and the film improves. There’s also some impressively choreographed action during a climactic face-off in and around an abandoned amusement park attraction. It’s frustrating that early sections of the feature are so frantic and bizarrely fused together, as spending more time with these characters sans montages and voice-overs, could have improved the movie dramatically.

Alas, the good elements that do appear arrive too little and too late to ultimately salvage the film. And for those curious about post-credits clips, the movie only provides a single verbal gag delivered using (you guessed it!) a voice-over. It’s not worth staying for unless you do happen to have really enjoyed the previous 100 minutes. In the end, there isn’t enough meat on the bones here to provide the *Birds of Prey* with a satisfying meal.

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